# Youth Engagement in Policy Profile: New Orleans Youth Alliance

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*New Orleans Youth Alliance's year-long Leadership Fellowship prepares youth for leadership roles aligned with their unique interests.*

## Executive Summary

In 2019, the New Orleans Youth Alliance (NOYA) created the NOYA Youth Leadership Fellowship (Fellowship), which provides 10 months of weekly training and experiential learning to a cohort of young people (Fellows) ages 17-24. The Fellowship is designed to prepare young people for and connect them with leadership roles in local systems, programs, and initiatives that impact their lives. Embedded in the Fellowship is a 6-week policy series—initially established by the inaugural cohort of Fellows to guide the work of the Fellowship—through which the Fellows identify and learn from local experts on policy topics of interest (e.g., health, housing) and develop their advocacy skills.

Fellows shape their experiences throughout the Fellowship by identifying individual opportunities aligned with their interests (e.g., serving alongside adults on a working group to develop the New Orleans Youth Master Plan) and creating an end-of-Fellowship project as a cohort (e.g., developing an authentic youth engagement checklist for use by NOYA and other organizations). These experiences look different for each Fellow and each cohort, as they are tailored to the individual. Throughout the Fellowship, young people receive support from their fellowship coordinator and other NOYA staff, who build personal relationships with Fellows, help connect them to external resources and partners in their areas of interest, and provide training on topics such as grant-writing, networking, social and critical analysis, and communication. NOYA's youth-centered culture helps Fellows feel cared for and valued, and NOYA strives to spread this culture throughout youth-serving entities in New Orleans. To build more inclusive and safe environments for authentic youth engagement, NOYA offers training to partner organizations on authentic youth engagement through its Professional Development and Organizational Effectiveness department.

In addition to the increasing youth leadership on decision-making bodies, workgroups, and advisory boards, and modeling and supporting authentic youth engagement across the community, Fellows and NOYA staff described a variety of other positive changes resulting from the Fellowship. For example, the Fellowship has resulted in increased decision maker awareness of policy issues affecting young people and their families, collaborative decision making within NOYA (e.g., Fellows serve as members of the board and on interview committees), new connections between Fellows and adults within the community (e.g., mentorship), and personal and professional growth for Fellows. NOYA plans to continue building on these positive outcomes as it prepares for its 2025-2026 Fellowship cohort.

# Introduction

In recent years, policy advocates and decision makers have increasingly turned to young people with lived experience navigating youth-serving systems (e.g., child welfare, employment) to inform policy.[i, ii]  The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Foster Youth and Opportunity Youth Initiatives ("Initiatives") have prioritized grantmaking to organizations that engage youth in their policy efforts. Child Trends partnered with the Initiatives and five of their grantee organizations—including the New Orleans Youth Alliance (NOYA)—to explore the roles youth play in the policy process, factors that support or hinder authentic youth engagement, and the outcomes associated with authentic youth engagement. NOYA and the other four participating organizations each identified one youth and one adult representative to serve on the Research Group, which met regularly throughout this project to participate in the design of the study, data analysis, and dissemination of findings (see Methodology and Data).

Child Trends built on existing frameworks[iii, iv] to refine the Authentic Youth Engagement in Policy Framework (Framework), which was adapted based on the experiences of the Research Group and findings from this study. The Framework details (1) the roles youth play in the policy process, (2) the stages at which youth are engaged, (3) how organizations support and empower youth, (4) local contextual factors that influence authentic youth engagement, and (5) how authentic youth engagement influences outcomes. This Framework guided data collection and analysis and may serve as a tool for readers to examine their own work and opportunities to expand and support authentic youth engagement in the policy process.

This brief applies the Framework to NOYA's experiences engaging youth in the NOYA Youth Leadership Fellowship (Fellowship), which aims to build young people's capacity to engage in leadership roles that align with their unique interests in local systems, programs, and initiatives. This includes offering a series of weekly policy- and advocacy-related trainings, workshops, and external advocacy and network-building opportunities focused on various policy topics such as housing, health, and workforce development.  Each section begins with a brief overview of the Framework; for a detailed overview, see the Authentic Youth Engagement in Policy Framework.

Definitions:

- **Youth or young people**: These terms are used interchangeably to refer to youth and young adults with lived experience navigating the child welfare, education, employment, and other youth-serving systems. NOYA Leadership Fellowship participants are ages 17-24.

- **Authentic youth engagement**: Youth are active partners in shaping decisions, policies, and programs. They are empowered and valued as contributors, co-creators, and decision makers in their communities and intentionally supported in these roles.

- **Policy process**: Policy identification, formulation, advocacy, and implementation. This study focused on local and state policies, including legislative and administrative policies.

# NOYA Leadership Fellowship

NOYA serves as an intermediary among youth development organizations in New Orleans, working to support "a system of high-quality, well-resourced youth development organizations that center youth leadership, racial equity, and intersectional equity in their work with young people." As an intermediary, NOYA serves as an umbrella organization that brings together youth-serving organizations, as well as young people, to provide resources and opportunities to improve programs and services offered in New Orleans. NOYA staff facilitate professional development workshops and trainings for their partners, support local and state advocacy efforts related to youth-serving systems, and prioritize youth leadership and collaboration in all efforts.

While youth leadership and collaboration have long been pillars of NOYA's work, NOYA and their partners recognized a need for increased leadership development and engagement opportunities for the young leaders within their organizations. However, many partners had limited capacity to support young people's leadership development. With this in mind, NOYA established the NOYA Youth Leadership Fellowship ("Fellowship") in 2019. This 10-month fellowship prepares young people ages 17-24 representative of the New Orleans Metropolitan area to assume leadership roles in local systems, programs, and initiatives impacting their lives.

**Policy Win:** NOYA's Youth Leadership Fellowship builds young people's capacity to engage in leadership roles aligned with their unique interests in local systems, programs, and initiatives by offering a series of policy- and advocacy-related trainings, workshops, and external advocacy and network building opportunities.

The Fellowship provides the young people engaged, hereafter referred to as Fellows, with weekly trainings and workshops, including a 6-week Policy Series, networking events, and connections to advocacy opportunities, with the goal of building or deepening their leadership and advocacy skills and professional development. In collaboration with NOYA's Policy Team (i.e., their fellowship coordinator and director of policy), Fellows are connected with individual leadership and advocacy opportunities that align with their topical interests (e.g., placement on local decision-making bodies) and design a cohort-led, end-of-Fellowship project (i.e., group project) focused on a policy topic or issue(s) of the Fellows' choice each year that highlights their knowledge and skills gained (e.g., developing an authentic youth engagement checklist or serving as grant reviewers for community change initiatives).

This profile explores the Fellowship model and the activities Fellows participate in that build their capacity to engage in youth-leadership opportunities, policy change, and system transformation. In particular, this policy win focuses on the cohort-style model and the 6-week Policy Series during which Fellows learn about policies from topic experts in areas such as health, transportation, and housing; build community relationships; and develop skills to engage in advocacy and leadership opportunities related to their topics of interest. This Policy Series, established by the inaugural cohort of Fellows, serves as a guide for the duration of each Fellowship cohort, and informed the development of the Fellowship's youth-led policy agenda ("Rebuilding Our Village NOLA"). Each year, the Fellows lead initiatives such as the Rebuilding Our Village NOLA Youth Fund.

# How Are Youth Involved?

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**Authentic Youth Engagement in Policy Framework**

There are many different roles that youth may play in the policy process as they share their lived expertise. Their roles may continuously shift over time and depending on the activity. In this study, youth roles were organized into:

- **Speaking**: Adults lead policy change, and youth share their ideas and opinions for policy change
- **Co-designing**: Youth and adults partner to lead policy change
- **Designing**: Youth lead policy change and adults assist

Youth often start in speaking roles and with scaffolding, support, and intentional organizational shifts in leadership from adults to youth, move into co-design and design roles over time.[v]

Youth may play these roles at different stages within the policy process, which we organized into four stages for the purposes of this study:

- **Policy identification**: Identifying the problem and gathering background information
- **Policy formulation**: Formulating policy solutions, including drafting policy
- **Policy advocacy**: Advocating for policy change through a variety of mechanisms such as building coalitions, educating decision makers, and building public awareness
- **Policy implementation:** Monitoring and supporting implementation of policy changes

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In the example of the NOYA Fellowship, Fellows are involved in roles that span speaking, co-designing, and designing. These roles apply both to how Fellows shape their Fellowship experience as well as the leadership and advocacy opportunities they participate in.

Fellows begin the Fellowship by identifying their individual goals and interests for the Fellowship and co-design with the Policy Team how the Fellowship can align with and support their individual and collective goals for leadership development and policy change. This initial goal setting informs the trajectory of the Fellowship for each cohort and Fellows' involvement in all stages of the policy process by helping to shape (1) the trainings, workshops, and activities Fellows participate in throughout the Fellowship, including their group project, and (2) the external leadership and advocacy opportunities.

> "…it was never like a preset conversation where they're trying to lead us from A, B, to C or like tunnel us into one specific thing, it's more so, 'hey these are the statistics, these are the facts' and like these are the experts that know the facts and know how everything works and can help us understand the underlying mechanics of some different things." **– Fellow**

Fellows are connected with support from the NOYA Policy Team. For example, the Fellowship's 6-week Policy Series topics allows Fellows to learn about policies from topic experts and supports Fellows in determining policy problems to address individually or as a cohort (policy identification). However, Fellows may work with their fellowship coordinator to modify policy topics of interest for the 6-week Policy Series as applicable.

As the Fellowship progresses, Fellows' increased knowledge of policy problems informs their cohort's group project and the individual opportunities they pursue. For example, one cohort of Fellows developed a policy platform with their policy recommendations for improving youths' health and well-being, economic stability, and safety and justice (policy formulation). Individual opportunities for Fellows are related to their interests and include activities such as serving as panelists on topics like career pathways and education (policy advocacy) or serving as grant reviewers for community grant programs (policy implementation). See Figure 1 for examples of the roles and activities Fellows have engaged in.

"...so NOYA was definitely there as a guide and just doing the background work of solidifying some things, but our job was to be the ambassadors right, and to represent the [policy] platform we wanted to be supported..." **– Fellow**

"...I recently just came from a convention in Aspen on behalf of NOYA and I was able to hold some conversations with some different organizations throughout the country and just understand like what can we do to truly help the youth, but also like how can we get more youth involved with the city and environment around them." **- Fellow**

**Figure 1**. Youth Roles and Activities in the Leadership Fellowship

| Youth Roles | Stage of the Policy Process | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **Policy Identification** | **Policy Formulation** | **Policy Advocacy** | **Policy Implementation** |
| **Speaking** | | Fellows provided feedback on the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA) transportation system and improving accessibility. | Fellows met with key decision makers and garnered support through petitions and endorsements for their policy platform and agenda (Rebuilding Our Village NOLA), which they designed as a group project. | Fellows provided feedback on how updates to RTA transportation system were working and encouraged other individuals to engage with the new system. |
| **Co-Designing** | Fellows collaborate with their Fellowship Coordinator and NOYA staff to determine policy topics of interest presented throughout the Policy Series. Fellows, NOYA staff, and external partners co-facilitate discussions about policies, processes, and their implications on daily life and communities during the Policy Series, identifying policy problems to address. | Fellows served on a working group to design the Youth Master Plan – a youth-led comprehensive roadmap for creating and sustaining positive youth-development. | | Fellows serve on an advisory board to review and provide input on grant applications for Rebuilding Our Village NOLA Youth Fund - a grant opportunity to support projects and initiatives that align with Rebuilding Our Village NOLA's policy agenda. |
| **Designing** | As a group project, Fellows led a research project on community members' experiences in the hospitality industry and workforce leadership development. The project identified barriers to and gaps in professional and leadership development opportunities. | Fellows developed a policy platform and agenda ("Rebuilding Our Village NOLA") as a group project, which includes policy recommendations related to health and well-being, economic stability, and safety and justice of youth and guides subsequent policy advocacy efforts within the Fellowship. | Fellows collectively wrote and published an opinion editorial on the hospitality industry and gaps in workforce leadership programs, based on their group research project. | |

# How Does the Fellowship Empower and Support Youth?

| Authentic Youth Engagement in Policy Framework |
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| Organizations create environments that empower youth to engage in the policy process by implementing supportive structures and facilitating meaningful connections.<br><br>• **Structures** include:<br>   o **Centering youth** in the organization's work by adopting specific frameworks (e.g., holistic well-being framework) or broader values related to shifting decision-making power and leadership to youth and viewing youth as experts.<br>   o Implementing **practices** that support authentic youth engagement, including recruitment strategies, regular meeting structures, mutual respect between adults and youth, safe spaces where youth feel comfortable sharing their ideas and experiences, flexible and accessible participation options, regular debriefing of youth experiences, and transparent communication.<br>   o Providing **resources** to youth, such as financial compensation and transportation to facilitate participation, connecting youth with external resources to meet their individual needs, training youth and adults, and equipping youth with data and information.<br><br>• **Connections** include:<br>   o **Peer support**: Youth foster an inclusive community, build relationships, and provide emotional support to one another when needed.<br>   o **Adult support**: Adults develop mentoring relationships with youth and connect youth with external resources to support their engagement.<br>   o **Connection to future benefits**: Youth have access to professional development opportunities such as internships and networking opportunities. |

**Centering of youth** throughout the Fellowship and **youth training** were the most commonly identified structures that contributed to Fellows' engagement in the Fellowship and their external leadership and advocacy opportunities. Interviewees described that NOYA staff welcome and prioritize youth voice and perspectives in the Fellowship (e.g., prioritizing youth-led discussions in the Policy Series) and acknowledge youth as experts in their own experiences. Additionally, NOYA staff and partners provide training to the Fellows on a range of topics. During the six-week Policy Series, Fellows learn about local and state history, policies, and policy processes, and apply their learnings through activities such as brainstorming about how they would distribute state and local funding if they were a local decision maker. Fellows also receive training on effective communication, networking, and grant writing. Fellows described the trainings as relevant to their own lives and important for developing their knowledge and skills to enact change.

> "Nothing about us without us is what I believe and NOYA also believes [this] as they are always centering and prioritizing the voice of young people." **- Fellow**

Throughout the Fellowship, interviewees described **adult support** as the most common connection that empowers youth to engage in the policy process. Specifically, youth interviewees described how having a dedicated fellowship coordinator provided Fellows with the ability to build individual relationships with a NOYA staff member, expand relationships with other staff members, and facilitate Fellows' connections to both NOYA's external partners and the broader New Orleans community and

"…[Fellowship coordinator] checks up on me, randomly asks me how I'm feeling and that's – it's a small thing for me that matters because it's not often you get that – a person that asks you how you're feeling, is there anything I can do to help, how can I support, so I really appreciate moments like that." **- Fellow**

resources. Youth interviewees emphasized how their fellowship coordinators were caring, readily available to support, and easy to talk to, all of which facilitated their connection and contributing to Fellows' engagement in Fellowship activities. For additional examples of NOYA's organizational strategies to support the fellows, see Figure 2.

**Figure 2**. Organizational Strategies Used by NOYA to Empower and Support the Fellows

| Structures | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Centering Youth** | **Practices** | **Resources** |
| • Emphasis on a culture of collaboration between Fellows and NOYA staff (e.g., co-designing the Fellowship curriculum)<br>• Acknowledgement of youth as experts and encouraging youth to share their experiences | • **Accessible** meeting formats (e.g., in person and virtual)<br>• **Meeting structures** that allow Fellows to develop and revisit their community guidelines, which serve as norms and expectations<br>• **Mutual respect** between staff and Fellows as peers without power differentials<br>• **Flexible participation** with an open-door policy | • **Supportive resources** including stipends, transportation as needed, and meals for in-person sessions |

| Connections | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Adult Support** | **Peer Support** | **Future Benefits** |
| • NOYA staff:<br> o Connect Fellows to community partners aligned with their interests (e.g., Black feminist advocates and community recreation centers)<br> o Serve as mentors and model professionalism and self-advocacy | • Dedicated team building activities for Fellows (e.g., escape rooms, retreats)<br>• Fellows and alumni support each other (e.g., peer mentorship, attending each other's events outside of the fellowship) | • Connections to job shadowing and internship opportunities<br>• Professional development in leadership, goal setting, communication, and networking<br>• Skill-set development in preparation to serve on boards of youth-serving organizations |

Interviewees identified various challenges related to organizational strategies, primarily related to adult training and meeting structures. Youth and adult interviewees reflected on the need to continue training both NOYA and partner organizations' staff to combat implicit and explicit instances of adultism, which one youth interviewee described as "turning down youth ideas or making us feel like what we think or what we wanna do isn't as important." Meeting structures and logistics also presented a challenge, as some interviewees recounted that sometimes they were unclear about meeting goals and objectives or not having enough time to discuss concerns as a group.

# What Local Factors Help or Hinder Youth Engagement?

| Authentic Youth Engagement in Policy Framework |
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| Local contextual factors include any characteristics of the local environment (e.g., political, geographical, historical) that help or hinder authentic youth engagement in the policy process. In this study, contextual factors were organized into five categories: <ul><li>**Stakeholder and partner engagement**: Stakeholders' and partners' receptivity to and engagement with youth</li><li>**Political landscape**: The effect of local and/or state politics (e.g., majority political party's policy priorities) on youth engagement and state and local policies</li><li>**History of youth engagement**: Historical and recent examples of youth engagement in the community</li><li>**Philanthropic/private support**: Funder investments in youth engagement</li><li>**Historical local and systemic inequities**: Inequitable access to supports and resources</li><li>**Geography and infrastructure**: Physical landscape and infrastructure (e.g., transportation) available to support youth engagement</li></ul> |

In the example of the NOYA Fellowship, youth and adult interviewees identified two common local contextual factors that have hindered both authentic youth engagement in the New Orleans community generally and during Fellowship advocacy activities in particular: (1) history of youth engagement and (2) political landscape. Simultaneously, interviewees reflected on how the Fellowship has helped to shift the local context to be more supportive of youth engagement in New Orleans.

**History of youth engagement.** Historically opportunities for authentic youth engagement in New Orleans have been limited, affecting how youth and adult supporters interact with decision makers and partners. For instance, throughout the Fellowship, NOYA leverages their community partners as resources to connect young people to individual leadership opportunities, build youth-adult relationships, and support group projects. While this has helped to increase authentic

"…it kind of was just the result of knowing that there was a deep need for leadership programs that were a little bit more extensive because I think there are a lot of – and this isn't even to say that there's a lack of – but I think when it comes to some of the programs that we have in the city, it wasn't like the programs themselves were able to really have this sort of opportunity for young people." **– Staff**

youth engagement opportunities in New Orleans, concerns remain among both youth and adult interviewees about whether partners and stakeholders will engage youth in authentic, positive ways. For example, adult interviewees identified that partner organizations in the beginning stages of engaging youth may require preparation for adults on authentic youth engagement to ensure they are equipped to support and center youth in positive, meaningful ways rather than having youth "just serving as a placeholder" which can cause unintended harm.

Similarly, youth interviewees described how despite growth in youth engagement and leadership opportunities, concerns remain about whether environments will be safe for and inclusive of youth, noting that these concerns can hinder youths' desire to participate in opportunities. Nonetheless, interviewees reported that youth engagement in systems change in New Orleans has increased in recent years, and described the Fellowship as a catalyst for increased authentic youth engagement and leadership opportunities offered among youth-serving systems and organizations. In particular, NOYA has provided training to partner organizations on authentic youth engagement prior to connecting Fellows with partner organizations, and the Fellowship has increased community interest in engaging young people.

**Political landscape.** Youth and adult interviewees recounted how the political landscape of the New Orleans community contributes to youths' experiences engaging with decision makers and partners, especially during policy advocacy activities, and described how youth engagement with decision makers and partners has evolved over time. For example, youth interviewees reflected on earlier instances of policies created to address crime in New Orleans without input from young people, ultimately conveying young people in a negative light. These depictions prompted Fellows to become reactive in their policy advocacy efforts, working to shift policymakers' perceptions of young people. While opportunities remain to continue shifting perceptions of young people in the New Orleans community, interviewees described how Fellows' engagement with policymakers has improved. In particular, interviewees described that local policymakers and other partners tend to be aligned with and supportive of the policy issues and change efforts that Fellows have championed (e.g., the Fellows' "Rebuilding Our Village NOLA" policy platform and agenda). However, youth interviewees suspected that garnering support would have been more challenging without alignment between youth and local policymakers' issues of interest.

# What Outcomes Did Youth Achieve?

| Authentic Youth Engagement in Policy Framework |
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| Authentic youth engagement in the policy process can lead to changes at the individual, organizational, community, and policy levels. This project focused specifically on organizational and policy outcomes; however, we share examples across all relevant levels:<br><br>• **Policy outcomes**: Administrative and/or legislative policy changes, and the intermediate steps that lead to these changes (e.g., increased decision maker awareness, new coalitions)<br><br>• **Community outcomes**: Changes within the community (e.g., how youth are engaged by other entities, shifting community narratives and mental models of youths' strengths and needs, and more equitable access to services)<br><br>• **Organizational outcomes**: Changes in how the organization engages youth<br><br>• **Youth outcomes**: Changes for individual youth (e.g., increased self-efficacy; skill development, including transferable skills; and sense of belonging) |

Since NOYA serves as an intermediary, connecting young people and adults together to build collaborative relationships and increasing youth leadership and engagement opportunities in youth-serving systems, the outcomes identified below represent how youth leadership and engagement evolved within the local New Orleans community (e.g., youth-serving organizations) and youth-serving systems (e.g., education, health, youth justice). Furthermore, as each cohort of Fellows chooses the focus of their group project and can be independent from previous years, the outcomes below represent the overarching outcomes Fellows have achieved across cohorts. While outcomes have been achieved across all four domains, youth and community outcomes were cited most frequently during interviews (see Table below).

**Table 1**. Outcomes of Authentic Youth Engagement

| Outcomes | |
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| Policy | • **Youth engagement and leadership**. Fellows serve on decision-making bodies, organize advocacy efforts, and join work groups and advisory boards at the local and state level.<br><br>• **Youth-adult relationships and connections.** Fellows interact with and build relationships with key decision makers to discuss policy issues and support system change.<br><br>• **Decision maker support and awareness.** Increased local decision makers' support for and awareness of policy issues identified by Fellows, such as health and well-being, economic stability, and safety and justice for youth and their families. |
| Community | • **Community awareness.** Increased community member awareness of youth engagement opportunities and youth-serving organizations.<br><br>• **Youth and adult connections.** Community members are interested in building additional relationships with youth and additional youth development supports. This includes establishing career pathways, increasing youth engagement in organizations, and mentorship opportunities.<br><br>• **Model and thought leader for youth engagement.** NOYA serves as a model for authentic youth engagement and youth leadership development opportunities, supporting and serving as a thought partner to community partners.<br><br>• **Shifting power.** Incorporation of youth voice in decision making and centering youth voice has grown throughout the community. |
| Organization | • **Alumni engagement and leadership.** Alumni Fellows engage in a reciprocal relationship with NOYA, giving back to the organization by building relationships and supporting newer Fellowship cohort, as well as providing training on topics like authentic youth engagement within NOYA's Professional Development & Organizational Effectiveness department.<br><br>• **Collaborative decision making**. Fellows serve as board members and members of interview committees, as well as support organizational continuous improvement efforts. |

| Outcomes | |
|---|---|
| Youth | • **Professional development.** Fellows have developed skills in collaboration, communication, professionalism, and networking, and have increased access to external opportunities (e.g., international travel and mentorship).<br><br>• **Peer relationships and support systems.** Fellows' relationships with other like-minded individuals and peer support systems have expanded.<br><br>• **Capacity building.** Fellows deepened their foundational skills and knowledge of policies and legislative processes, local context and history, systems, and implications of policies, as well as areas for improvement.<br><br>• **Personal growth.** Fellows' sense of awareness of their own passions and life trajectories has increased. This includes awareness of their personal and career goals and interests.<br><br>• **Civic engagement.** Fellows' interest in policy issues and advocacy opportunities has grown. This includes real-world application of learnings into advocacy efforts, and increased involvement in policy change. |

"A lot of Fellows have been able to take what they learned from the Fellowship and run with it, if not for their own careers, [then] by advocating for policy with City Council or things like the Youth Master Plan…" **– Fellow**

As NOYA continues to support the New Orleans community and opportunities for youth leadership and engagement, there is excitement and plans to strengthen the Fellowship. Planned changes include expanding the topics of the Policy Series and the types of topic experts that participate in the Policy Series, deepening community partnerships and resources NOYA connects Fellows with, and expanding the number of youth leadership and advocacy opportunities Fellows are involved in. Additionally, plans are underway for a new cohort of Fellows for the 2025-26 year.

# Acknowledgments

# Appendix: Methodology and Data

This project was a community engaged research project – a collaborative approach to research that enables researchers and community members to develop and/or conduct research that is motivated by and meets the needs of a community. Child Trends conducted this project in partnership with a Research Group comprised of one youth representative and one adult representative from each of the five grantee organizations participating in the study, including NOYA. Research Group members were paid consultants to Child Trends. Child Trends served as the research and technical assistance partner and convened the Research Group 10 times from July 2024 to June 2025 to participate in the design of the study, data analysis, and dissemination of findings.

Members of the Research Group identified this policy win and recruited their peers and partners to participate in interviews. This profile of NOYA is informed by six interviews with a total of nine youth and three staff, supplemented with information gleaned from four documents. We coded all transcripts and documents in Dedoose and conducted thematic analysis with the Research Group to distill our findings and finalize the Authentic Youth Engagement in Policy Framework. For more information on study's methodology, please see https://www.childtrends.org/publications/authentic-youth-engagement-policy-framework.

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